



# Indiana State Department of Health

## Epidemiology Resource Center

### Quick Facts

#### About... MRSA in Schools

##### What is MRSA and why is it a concern for schools?

MRSA is a type of *Staphylococcus aureus* (staph) bacterium that is resistant to antibiotics such as methicillin, penicillin, and often others. MRSA infections in students or school staff members can cause a great deal of anxiety for parents and others in the community. Schools may provide favorable conditions for transmission, but with proper preventative procedures in place the spread of MRSA (and other staph infections) can be controlled. (See [Quick Facts on MRSA](#))

##### How is MRSA spread in schools?

MRSA is spread normally through direct skin-to-skin contact. MRSA and other staph infections can also be spread through contact with items that have been touched by a person with MRSA such as towels, shared athletic equipment, etc... Some settings, such as schools, make it easier for spread to occur due to factors such as crowding, frequent skin-to-skin contact, compromised skin (e.g. cuts or abrasions caused during sporting events or gym classes), contaminated items and lack of cleanliness.

##### Should schools be closed when MRSA infections occur?

Schools SHOULD NOT be closed due to MRSA infections in students or staff. It should be remembered that MRSA transmission can be prevented by simple measures such as hand hygiene, covering wounds and others as noted below. Local and state public health officials should be consulted if school closing is being considered.

### **Should schools be completely disinfected when a MRSA infection occurs?**

Generally, it is NOT NECESSARY to “disinfect” schools when MRSA infections occur. Surfaces that are likely to have had contact with uncovered or poorly covered draining wounds should be cleaned and disinfected. Covering infections with clean dry bandages reduces the risk of surfaces becoming contaminated with MRSA. When cleaning and disinfection is warranted on surfaces suspected of being contaminated, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) registered disinfectants should be used exactly as indicated on the label of the product. A fresh (prepared daily) 1:100 dilution of sodium hypochlorite (bleach) is an effective alternative disinfectant.

### **How can MRSA transmission be prevented in schools?**

- Schools should consider these general guidelines for prevention of MRSA
  - Provide any identified case of MRSA with general information about the disease such as the [ISDH Quick Fact Sheet on MRSA](#) or the CDC Web site information listed at the end of this document.
  - Encourage regular hand washing
  - Ensure access to sinks, soaps and clean towels
  - Have alcohol-based sanitizers available when and where appropriate if soap and water is not available
  - Discourage sharing of personal items such as towels, razors, toothbrushes, etc...
  - Regularly clean sinks, showers and toilets
  - Encourage daily showers and bathing with soap and water.
  - Launder towels, sheets, sports uniforms, and underclothing with water and laundry detergent and dry completely on the hottest setting.

### **Should the entire school community and staff be notified of every MRSA infection?**

Normally it is not necessary to inform the entire school community, including parents, about each case of MRSA. When a MRSA infection occurs in a student or staff member the school nurse, administrators and school physician should determine whether all or some students and/or staff should be notified. It should be remembered that MRSA and other staph infections have been a common cause of skin infections for many years. If a notification letter is sent home, the local public health department should be informed prior to the letter being sent.

### **Should students or staff with MRSA (or skin infections) be excluded from school?**

There are no specific exclusion provisions found in Indiana communicable disease laws or rules for MRSA. Students or staff should not be excluded from attending school unless directed by a health care provider, or if wound drainage cannot be

covered and contained with a dry bandage, or if good personal hygiene cannot be demonstrated. Students and staff do not need to be isolated or sent home in the middle of the school day if a suspected skin infection that could be staph or MRSA is noticed. Make sure the area is washed with soap and water and covered.

### **What additional advice is there for school health staff?**

School health personnel should notify parents/guardians when their child has a possible skin infection, and if necessary the student should be referred to a licensed health care provider for diagnosis and treatment. School nurses and others should use standard precautions (e.g., hand hygiene before and after contact, wearing gloves) when caring for potential infections. The ISDH has a [Care of Your Skin](#) poster that can be downloaded and strategically placed in the school.

### **How can teachers help?**

Teachers who observe children with open draining wounds or infections should refer the child to the school nurse. Teachers should encourage and enforce, when possible, hand hygiene with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizers before eating, after using the restroom, and other appropriate times.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information on MRSA, please refer to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site:

<http://www.cdc.gov/mrsa/>

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